

CELTIC LEAGUE – PRESS INFORMATION

PSNI NOT 'ON MESSAGE' OVER LANGUAGE RIGHTS

The arrest and forthcoming trial of a speaker of Irish in the north of Ireland must call into question whether with the 'rebranding' of the RUC as the PSNI anything has changed in relation to police attitudes to the nationalist community.

Máire Nic an Bhaired, a young woman from Belfast, experienced at first hand the attitude of the PSNI whilst chatting in Irish in the street with some of her teacher friends. It is alleged that a member of the PSNI left his vehicle and insulted her, demanding that she stop speaking that 'leprechaun language' and speak the 'Queens English in her country'. When, understandably she refused and stood up for her rights she was arrested and charged with obstruction and disorderly behaviour.

The Celtic League have been asked to lend its support to her campaign for justice and a copy of a letter to this effect from Seán Ó hAdhmaill, National Chairperson of Na Gaeil Óga, is set out below (In Irish with English translation)

Subsequently, the Celtic League Secretary General, Rhisiart Tal-e-bot, has written to the British government and Court which Máire will attend (see immediately below) expressing our concern.

The Celtic League is also considering representations to the Irish government highlighting the lack of commitment which the PSNI action illustrates in relation to the 'Belfast Agreement'.

The Agreement clearly sets out under the heading 'RIGHTS, SAFEGUARDS AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY' – "All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.". The section goes on to stress "the British Government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it take resolute action to promote the language facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand;"

Unfortunately the PSNI do not seem to be on message!

Bernard Moffatt Director of Information Celtic League

28 August 2006

The Secretary-General's letter the text of which is being sent to Laganside Courts and also to the Westminster governments representative in the north of Ireland, Peter Hain:

"I am writing to you on behalf of the Celtic League to express our concern following the arrest and trial of Máire Nic an Bhaird.

The arrest of Máire Nic an Bhaird, from the account that has been made public, appears to be unwarranted and provoked by what can only be described as bigotry and prejudice by the arresting officer.

The general public have the right to speak the Irish language on the street and as you will no doubt be aware this is a right upheld by several international Charters, laws and Treaties. The fact that Máire Nic an Bhaird arrest stemmed from the use of her own language while addressing a member of the PSNI in a public place in her own country, clearly shows not only a breach of her human rights, but also a possible gap in the education and/or training of PSNI officers.

In addition, it is my duty to object in the strongest of terms to the judicial system of Northern Ireland's refusal to allow Máire Nic an Bhaird to address the court in the Irish language. I am aware that the use of the Irish language in court is not solely confined to Máire Nic an Bhaird's case, but applies to all members of the Irish language speaking community in Northern Ireland. In today's European Union, where linguistic rights are synonymous with human rights, I can only view this legal omission to allow defendants to express themselves freely in their own language as a staggering oversight.

I would like my comments on this matter to be taken into consideration. When Máire Nic an Bhaird returns to court on 6 th September 2006 for the Laganside Court case, if she chooses to address the court in her own language, I request that she is permitted to do so.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Rhisiart Tal-e-bot Secretary General"

The text of the letter to the League from Seán Ó hAdhmaill:

"Tag : Cás Máire Nic an Bhaird, an Ghaeilge agus an PSNI

A Dhuine Uasail,

Fiú amháin le Comhaontú an Aoine Chéasta agus Coimisiún Patten, tá sé feicthe go bhfuil meas an PSNI ar cearta daonna mar a bhí sé i gcónaí. Sé sin le rá ní mórán más cainteoir Gaeilge tú. Tóg mar shampla cás Máire Nic an Bhaird.

Bhí an bean óg seo ó mBéal Feirste ag caint lena cairde i nGaeilge i mBéal Feirste nuair a tháinig ball den PSNI óna jeep ag screadaíl agus ag tabhairt drochíde do Máire ag iarraidh í gan labhairt an “Leprechaun language” agus ag iompú uirthi “Queens English in her country” a labhairt. Nuair a dhiúltaigh sí béarla a labhairt thosaigh an póilín ag éirí feargach agus bhuaíl sé í, gabh sé í agus cúisíodh í de bharr “obstruction and disorderly behaviour”. Sheas Máire suas di féin agus do phobal na Gaeilge agus ba chóir go mbeidh tacaíocht aici ó gach mar go bhfuil cearta teanga mar chearta daonna.

Ba mhian liom cuireadh a thabhairt duit mar thar cionn Mháire Nic an Bhaird, ball de Na Gaeil Óga agus múinteoir meánscoil lán-Ghaeilge a cúisíodh de dheasca, dar léi, gur labhair sí as Gaeilge amháin le ball den PSNI go dtí an cás cúirte.

Ó tharla an easpa muiníne atá ag Gaeilgeoirí i dtaca le córas dlí Tuisceart na hÉireann ach go háirithe i leith na Gaeilge de, tá muid ag iarraidh líon breathnóirí neamhspleácha a eagrú chun cinntiú nach sáraítear cearta teanga Iníon Nic an Bhaird.

Beidh an cás cúirte ar siúl ar an 6 Meán Fómhair ag a 10r.n. ag cúirt Chois an Lagáin.

Munar féidir leat freastail ar an gcás cúirte ag an dáta thuasluaite, bheinn buíoch dá mbuailfeá le Iníon Nic an Bhaird, ag dáta oiriúnach duit féin chun a gcás a phlé.

Ag súil le do fhreagra,

Is mise le meas,

Seán Ó hAdhmaill Cathaoirleach Náisiúnta Na Gaeil Óga

Ref : The case of Máire Nic an Bhaird, the Irish Language and the PSNI

A Dhuine Uasail,

Even with the Good Friday Agreement and the Patten Commission it seems that the PSNI's respect for Human rights remains the same, that being if you are a Irish language speaker you have none. Take for example the case of Máire Nic an Bhaird.

This young lady from Belfast was on a street in Belfast, chatting in Irish with some of her teacher friends when a member of the PSNI exploded from his jeep screaming foul abuse and insults at her before demanding that she stop speaking that 'leprechaun language' and speak the 'Queens English in her country'. When she refused to do so and answered him in her own language, he became enraged, assaulted, arrested and charged her for obstruction and disorderly behaviour. Máire stood up for herself and the Irish language speaking community and should have the full backing of all right-thinking people. Language rights are human rights.

Máire Nic Bhaird, a member of Na Gaeil Óga and a secondary school teacher in an Irish-medium school that was arrested for, in her words, speaking to a member of the PSNI in her native language, Irish.

As a result of the importance of this case and of the lack of confidence Irish-speakers have in the judicial system in the north of Ireland, with respect to language rights, I would like to invite you to act as an official observer during the court case in order to ensure a fair and transparent court case.

The next hearing of Ms. Nic an Bhaird's court case will take place at 10am on the 6th September 2006 at the Laganside Court case.

If you are unable to attend, I would appreciate it if you would meet with Ms. Nic an Bhaird at your convenience.

Eagerly awaiting your response,

Is mise le meas,

Seán Ó hAdhmaill National Chairperson Na Gaeil Óga"

The Celtic League has branches in the six Celtic Countries of the western British Isles and Brittany. It works to promote cooperation between these countries and campaigns on a broad range of political, cultural and environmental matters. It targets human rights abuse and monitors all military activity within these areas.

TEL (UK)01624 877918 MOBILE (UK)07624 491609

Internet site at:

<http://www.manxman.co.im/cleague>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/celtic_league/